



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue, S.
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

December 13, 2006

Mr. Chris C. Oynes, Regional Director
Minerals Management Service
Gulf of Mexico OCS Region
1201 Elmwood Park Blvd.
New Orleans, Louisiana 70123-2394

Dear Mr. Oynes:

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has received your letter of November 16, 2006, which invited our review of a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) and reinitiated programmatic essential fish habitat (EFH) consultation for petroleum development activities in the Central and Western Planning Areas (CPA and WPA, respectively) within the Gulf of Mexico OCS Region. The Minerals Management Service has requested reinitiation of consultation pursuant to the EFH provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to evaluate potential impacts to EFH and dependent fishery resources that could result from a minor expansion of the CPA into the Eastern Planning Area (EPA) and minor boundary realignment between the CPA and WPA. The EFH assessment to support an amendment of the programmatic consultation is contained in the DEIS for the "Gulf of Mexico OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sales: 2007-2012."

We have reviewed the programmatic EFH consultation completed in 1999 and the information contained in the DEIS. Based on our evaluation, we find that the EFH conservation recommendations provided by our letter of July 1, 1999, are sufficient to address potential adverse impacts associated with future lease sales encompassed within the eastward expansion of the CPA. We also find that the EFH programmatic consultation would not be affected by any change in the WPA and CPA boundary alignment.


Accordingly, provided our previous EFH conservation recommendations are adhered to in the conduct of activities in the expanded CPA, we find that the 1999 programmatic EFH consultation documents, as written, are adequate to incorporate the expanded CPA. No further EFH consultation will be required for operational activities within the original or expanded CPA that are covered by and consistent with provisions of the programmatic consultation.

Thank you for initiating this EFH review to allow consideration of the need to amend the



programmatic consultation between the Minerals Management Service Gulf of Mexico OCS Region and the NMFS. If you have any questions regarding this letter or other EFH issues, please contact Rickey N. Ruebsamen, my EFH Coordinator, at 850/234-5061.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Miles M Croom". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Miles M. Croom
Assistant Regional Administrator
Habitat Conservation Division

cc: F/SER46 – Ruebsamen
F/SER – Keys
PPI – Kokkinakis
F – Lindow
File